

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
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O 151445Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1289
INFO WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 2170

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM THE AMBASSADOR

WHITE HOUSE FOR BRZEZINSKI

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, EG, IS, US, XF
SUBJECT: BEGIN'S VIEW OF THE US-ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP AND NEXT
STEPS IN THE PEACE PROCESS

REF: A) STATE 38197, B) TEL AVIV 2031, C) TEL AVIV 2107, D) TEL
AVIV 1982

SUMMARY: BEGIN HAS GOTTEN OVER THE EXTREMES OF EMOTION
AND ANGER WHICH MARKED OUR MEETING SATURDAY NIGHT,
FEBRUARY 11. HE REMAINS CLEARLY DISCOURAGED, HOWEVER;
SADLY CONVINCED NOW THAT WE HAVE "LET HIM DOWN" IN WITHDRAWING
WHAT HE BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN OUR MORAL SUPPORT FOR HIS
PEACE PLAN; UNABLE TO SEE ANY POSSIBILITY OF REMOVING
THE ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN SINAI MUCH LESS THE WEST BANK;
AND ON THE POINT OF DECIDING THAT THE ONLY THING TO DO
IS TO WITHDRAW HIS ORIGINAL SINAI PEACE PROPOSAL AND
REPLACE IT WITH A NEW PEACE PROPOSAL WHICH WOULD INVOLVE
RECTIFICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL BORDER TO KEEP THE
SETTLEMENTS UNDER ISRAELI SOVEREIGNTY. END SUMMARY.

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1. AFTER MY MARATHON SESSION WITH BEGIN SATURDAY NIGHT
(FEB. 11) AND THE INCREASINGLY SOUR MOOD IN THE PUBLIC ARENA
HERE OVER THE LAST TWO OR THREE DAYS,
I ASKED TO SEE BEGIN ALONE WITHOUT ANY NOTETAKERS ON
EITHER SIDE FOR A MORE PRIVATE REVIEW OF THE STATE OF
OUR RELATIONS. HE RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY AND ASKED ME

TO COME TO HIS OFFICE YESTERDAY MORNING (FEBRUARY 14)
AT 9 A.M. WE SPENT ALMOST TWO HOURS TOGETHER IN A
CONSTRUCTIVE, UNEMOTIONAL REVIEW OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS.
IT WAS HELPFUL IN CLEARING SOME OF THE AIR, BUT LEFT ME
PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS.

2. INITIALLY I TALKED VERY FRANKLY ABOUT PROBLEMS I
SENSED HAD BEEN ARISING IN WASHINGTON AS A DIRECT RESULT
OF THE SETTLEMENTS IMBROGLIO, PROBLEMS OF IMPAIRED
ISRAELI CREDIBILITY AND INCREASING EXASPERATION ON OUR
PART WITH ISRAELI SETTLEMENT POLICY IN PARTICULAR.
IN THE COURSE OF THE DISCUSSION, I URGED HIM SEVERAL TIMES
TO PUT A FLAT MORATORIUM ON ALL NEW SETTLEMENTS ACTIVITY
FOR AT LEAST SIX MONTHS WHILE THE NEGOTIATIONS UNFOLDED.
AND I GAVE HIM MY OWN IMPRESSIONS OF AREAS WHERE ISRAEL
WOULD HAVE TO ADOPT A MORE FLEXIBLE POSITION ON CERTAIN
TYPES OF LANGUAGE IN ORDER FOR THE DECLARATION OF
PRINCIPLES EFFORT TO SUCCEED IN A REASONABLE PERIOD AFTER
ATHERTON'S RETURN. ALL THIS FREE ADVICE WAS WRAPPED IN
A GOOD DEAL OF MOIST COTTON BATTING AND LARDED WITH
THE SORT OF PERSONAL SUGGESTIONS ABOUT THE VITAL
IMPORTANCE WITH HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESIDENT CARTER
WHICH WOULD I THOUGHT MAKE IT MOST PALATABLE.

3. IN RESPONSE, BEGIN TOLD ME QUIETLY AND I THOUGHT
HONESTLY HOW DEEPLY "LET DOWN" HE FELT BY THE US AT
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THIS POINT. HE INSISTED THAT HE RETAINED THE WARMEST
POSSIBLE SENTIMENTS AND ADMIRATION FOR PRESIDENT CARTER;
AND ALSO REITERATED HIS VERY FRIENDLY FEELINGS FOR
SECRETARY VANCE DESPITE HIS "SHOCK" ABOUT VANCE'S
RECENT PRESS CONFERENCE. HE SAID HE HAD TAKEN GREAT
RISKS-- BOT FOR ISRAEL AND FOR HIS POLITICAL LIFE--BBF
PROPOSING TO RETURN ALL OF SINAI TO EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY
--SOMETHING NO OTHER ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER HAD EVER
DONE. HE REHEARSED AGAIN FOR ME WITH ALL SEEMING SIN-
CERITY HOW HE HAD HONESTLY BELIEVED HE HAD THE PRESIDENT'S
"MORAL SUPPORT" FOR HIS SINAI PROPOSAL WHEN HE LEFT
WASHINGTON IN DECEMBER. HE KNEW THE PRESIDENT HAD NOT
ENDORSED IT IN EVERY DETAIL, NOR HAD HE ASKED HIM TO.
BUT HE SAID HE HONESTLY BELIEVED THE PRESIDENT THOUGHT
IT WAS BOTH REASONABLE AND SOMETHING WHICH SADAT COULD
ACCEPT; OTHERWISE HE WOULD NOT HAVE TAKEN IT TO ISMAILIA.
NOW THAT HE REALIZED FROM OUR RECENT PUBLIC STATE-
MENTS THAT WE THOUGHT THE SETTLEMENTS HAD TO BE REMOVED,
SOMETHING NEITHER HIS GOVERNMENT NOR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENT
COULD EVER AGREE TO,, HE REALIZED SADLY THAT HIS PEACE
PROPOSAL WAS HIS ALONE.

4. IN THIS CIRCUMSTANCE, HE CONFIDED, HE HAD ABOUT REACHED THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE FOR HIM BUT TO FOLLOW THE ACCEPTED PRACTICE UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW AND WITHDRAW FORMALLY HIS SINAI PROPOSAL. (HE MADE CLEAR HE WAS NOT CONTEMPLATING WITHDRAWING HIS SELF-RULE PLAN FOR THE WEST BANK.) SINCE SECRETARY VANCE'S PUBLIC STATEMENT THAT THE SETTLEMENTS "SHOULD NOT EXIST" HAD CUT THE GROUND OUT FROM UNDER ISRAEL'S POSSIBILITIES OF NEGOTIATING A SATISFACTORY ARRANGEMENT FOR THEIR RETENTION UNDER EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY, HE HAD ABOUT CONCLUDED THERE WAS NO POINT IN TRYING TO GO FURTHER DOWN THIS ROAD. HE SAID IN GREAT CONFIDENCE THAT THE CABINET HAD DISCUSSED THIS PROBLEM ON SUNDAY IN DETAIL. CABINET SENTIMENT, INCLUDING STRONGLY
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THE DMC MEMBERS, WAS NOW IN FAVOR OF REPLACING THE ISRAELI PEACE PROPOSALS WITH A NEW VERSION --ONE IN WHICH THE SETTLEMENTS WOULD REMAIN UNDER ISRAELI SOVEREIGNTY AND THERE WOULD BE MINOR RECTIFICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL FRONTIER INVOLVING EXCHANGES OF TERRITORY BETWEEN EGYPT AND ISRAEL. HE SAID HE HAD NOT FORMALLY TAKEN THIS STEP YET, BUT HE WAS SADLY CONCLUDING IT WAS PERHAPS THE ONLY LOGICAL THING TO DO IN LIGHT OF OUR POSITION.

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 02170 02 OF 02 151539Z
ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
-----024718 151542Z /45
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1290
INFO WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 2170

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM THE AMBASSADOR

WHITE HOUSE FOR BRZEZINSKI

5. I TRIED TO PERSUADE HIM NOT TO TAKE ANY PRECIPITIOUS ACTION IN THIS REGARD, SAYING THAT I HAD NO REASON TO BELIEVE FROM WHAT I HAD HEARD OF THE EGYPTIAN VIEW THAT THIS WOULD HAVE ANY PROSPECT FOR SUCCESS. BUT CERTAINLY HE SHOULD DO NOTHING UNTIL HE HAD HAD A THOROUGH DISCUSSION WITH ATHERTON AND PROBABLY NOT UNTIL AFTER HIS ANTICIPATED TRIP TO WASHINGTON.

6. SINCE BEGIN KEPT RETURNING TO THE SECRETARY'S PRESS CONFERENCE PHRASE ABOUT THE SETTLEMENTS, I TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAY THAT WASHINGTON HAD FULLY ENDORSED MY OWN INTERPRETATION OF THE SECRETARY'S

REMARK AS I HAD GIVEN IT TO HIM ON SATURDAY NIGHT (TEL AVIV 2017, PARA FOURTEEN). HE WAS PLEASED TO HEAR THAT INDEED MY INTERPRETATION WAS ENDORSED, AND SAID IT WOULD BE VERY HELPFUL IF THAT COULD BE DONE PUBLICLY IN WASHINGTON. HE CAME BACK TO THIS POINT SEVERAL TIMES.

7. MOST OF THE REST OF THE CONVERSATION WAS A REPLAY OF SATURDAY NIGHT'S DISCUSSION IN A NON-HISTRIONIC MODE.

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I PROBED ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS TO SEE WHETHER THERE WAS ANY WAY TO GET BEGIN TO THINK ABOUT A COMMITMENT TO ULTIMATE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WEST BANK AFTER A LENGHTY TRANSITION PERIOD HAD ENSUED. HE WAS QUIETLY ADAMANT. I TRIED OUT VARIOUS POSSIBLE WAYS OF DEFINING SELF-DETERMINATION WHICH MIGHT BE ACCEPTABLE TO HIM. NONE OF THEM WERE. I STRESSED THE HISTORIC MOMENT WHICH HAD BEEN OFFERED TO BOTH EGYPT AND ISRAEL AND TO THE REGION AS A WHOLE, AND TRIED TO SEE WHETHER HE WOULD RISK LOSING THAT MOMENT FOR HIS CONVICTIONS. HE COUNTERED WITH ARGUMENTS ABOUT HIS DOMESTIC OPPOSITION FROM HIS OLDEST AND BEST FRIENDS, AND INSISTED THAT NO ISRAELI GOVERNMENT WHICH CAME AFTER HIM WOULD BE ANY MORE ABLE THAN HIS GOVERNMENT EITHER TO DISMANTLE THE SETTLEMENTS OR TO WITHDRAW TOTALLY FROM THE WEST BANK. ALL OF THIS WAS SAID IN THE FRIENDLIEST AND SADDEST TONE OF VOICE, AND IT HARDLY LEFT ME IN AN EXUBERANT FRAME OF MIND. IT MADE ME ALL THE MORE CONVINCED THAT AN EARLY MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER WAS ESSENTIAL IF WE ARE TO HAVE A CHANCE TO KEEP THE NEGOTIATIONS GOING IN A DIRECTION WHICH PROVIDES ANY PROSPECT FOR SUCCESS. AND IT ALSO MAKES IT ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT TO AVOID DOING ANYTHING WHICH WOULD DAMAGE BEGIN'S CONTINUED ADMIRATION AND RESPECT FOR THE PRESIDENT. THAT REMAINS OUR BEST CARD.

8. ACTION REQUESTED: I RECOMMEND THAT THE DEPARTMENT'S PRESS SPOKESMAN BE AUTHORIZED AT AN EARLY STATE DEPARTMENT BRIEFING TO CLARIFY THE MEANING OF SECRETARY VANCE'S PHRASE AS FOLLOWS: QUOTE: WHAT THE SECRETARY MEANT QUITE CLEARLY WAS THAT SINCE WE HAVE ALWAYS CONSIDERED THE ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES TO BE ILLEGAL, IT WOULD BE BETTER IF THEY HAD NEVER EXISTED.

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END QUOTE. IF THIS CLARIFICATION WERE MADE, BEGIN WOULD SEE IT AS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE INTERPRETATION HE NOW INSISTS HE HAS: THAT THE SECRETARY HAS SAID THE SETTLEMENTS MUST BE REMOVED REGARDLESS, A POSITION WHICH BEGIN SEES AS TOTALLY INCONSISTENT WITH A STATEMENT THAT IT IS UP TO THE PARTIES TO NEGOTIATE THEIR ULTIMATE DISPOSITION.

9. SUGGEST THAT THIS MESSAGE BE REPEATED TO CAIRO FOR AMBASSADOR EILTS AND TO AMMAN FOR AMBASSADOR PICKERING. LEWIS

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